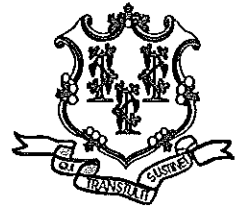




**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

**Public Hearing Testimony of
Commissioner Joette Katz**

**Planning & Development Committee
February 7, 2011**



**H. B. No. 5142 - AN ACT REQUIRING PUBLIC HEARINGS ON THE LOCATION OF
GROUP HOMES**

**H. B. No. 5259 - AN ACT REQUIRING PUBLIC HEARINGS ON THE LOCATION OF
GROUP HOMES**

The Department of Children and Families **opposes** H. B. No. 5142 and H. B. No. 5259. Both of these proposed bills would require a public hearing before approval of any new group home.

Background

DCF licenses over 60 group homes in 43 communities throughout the state, which have opened under the authority of section 8-3e of the General Statutes. All of our group homes are operated by private providers under contract with the Department and serve children with mental or physical disabilities.

Legal Concerns

The siting of group homes serving six or fewer individuals by DCF and other state agencies is protected by both state and federal law. **Case law has also been clear that imposing additional requirements of these homes, such as conducting a public hearing prior to approval, would not meet the legal requirements of state and federal law.**

Bringing CT's Children Home

Connecticut's children should have the opportunity to grow up in the least restrictive environment to meet their individual needs. One of the biggest challenges facing DCF at the present time is **the need to bring home many of the 360 children placed in out-of-state programs.** We need to do a better job providing for the needs of our children and group homes are a part of that solution.

DCF Group Homes

Most of the DCF group homes that have been established are therapeutic group homes which are small (4-6 bed) programs situated in houses in residential neighborhoods that should be indistinguishable from other homes. The youth residing in the homes often attend clinical day school programs at least when they first move to the homes, due to their having special

educational needs. However, it is a goal to have youth as fully integrated in community life, including educational life, as possible. Therapeutic group homes allow children and adolescents greater community integration through recreational involvement, volunteer activities, vocational opportunities, and social possibilities. In addition, the homes provide a living setting that is far closer to a "normal" family existence than is possible to provide in larger campus residential settings. A youth's ability to live in a manner that is closer to normal allows greater possibility for successful transition back to a family setting or to some form of independent living as young adults.

Therapeutic group homes provide an array of clinical and related services within the home, including therapy (individual, group, and family - whenever possible); nursing supports; ongoing psychiatric assessment and intervention (by a psychiatrist); recreational activities; integration with community resources (social, vocational, etc.); life skills taught within the context of the home. Since close to 100% of the youth being served have some history of trauma (including the trauma of disrupted attachments), all homes have some focus on addressing the history of trauma that these youth bring with them. The model being used in the homes is relational, geared toward repairing and improving relationships that these youth have with those around them.

Please do not enact legislation that will impose additional discriminatory requirements that most certainly will be challenged in state or federal courts.